



VIRGINIA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AGENCY PUBLIC SAFETY (WIRELESS/E-911) TOWN HALL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The following are highlights of the recent PSAP town hall meetings held statewide by VITA staff. These meetings were held in each of the regions, with one being conducted with an audio bridge available and another via video conference.

- VITA staff shared the intent of the town hall meetings, making it clear that the outcome will not be a “redo” of the existing Wireless E-911 Services Board’s Plan, but rather a reality check with the 9-1-1 stakeholder community. The current focus is on the PSAP community and the outcome will be an addendum to the current Plan.
- An overview of the current 9-1-1 Comprehensive Plan was provided, including the vision, goals, and initiatives. Two questions were answered by each participating audience:
 - Are these items still relevant and appropriate for the future of 9-1-1 and Next Generation 9-1-1?
 - What additions or changes (if any) should be considered by the Wireless Board?
- Other related issues discussed include:
 - The sustainability of PSAP operations, including current funding methodology and continued appropriateness
 - Next Generation 9-1-1 and the role of the 9-1-1 Comprehensive Plan, expected coordination through VITA, and strategic partnerships
 - Federal Initiatives: National Broadband Plan, the National 9-1-1 Office (<http://www.911.gov/>), the National 9-1-1 Resource Center (<http://www.911.gov/resources.html>), and the National Assessment Guidelines Working Group (NAGWG)

The town hall meetings’ intended audience included 9-1-1, public safety, and communication center telecommunicators, operators, dispatchers, communicators, supervisors, managers, and information technologies (IT) technicians; local law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical service (EMS), employees; local government officials and sheriffs; emergency management personnel at the local, regional, and state level; Virginia public safety related agencies; and state and federal legislators.

A summary of the suggestions and discussion points made by the meeting participants include:

- Need to educate all VA PSAPs on the progress of NG 9-1-1 pilots in Southwest and Southside
- Share benefits of backroom and connectivity components of the MERG project with VA PSAPs
- Mechanism for continued accuracy for wireless deployments
- Does each PSAP need direct IP telephony (or even NG 9-1-1 capable CPE), or can NG 9-1-1 be done regionally (e.g., TN is working on a project to have one NG 9-1-1 station at each PSAP? What does this network look like?)
- As far as a definition of NG 9-1-1; the only thing we can agree upon is that the definition needs to include IP
- Recurring costs for NG 9-1-1 will continue to constrain PSAPs' ability to embrace NG 9-1-1
- Without a local 9-1-1 surcharge, the perceived effect is that the PSAPs' operating budgets have increased dramatically and they are now asking for more local general fund dollars, which is not the case. In many cases, operating budgets have shrunk.
- Cost recovery is no longer necessary. The \$8M transfer is proof that we are collecting money that is no longer needed for its original purpose.
- Develop better relationships with training academies (possible Recruitment and Retention initiative)
- Determine what contributions can be made by APCO, NENA, ISP, and other organizations (tools in the toolbox) as a part of the Advocacy initiative
- Regional Coordinators to assist with defining standards for emergency response services based on regional needs/complexity (Standards initiative)
- VITA needs to start having regular regional meetings with the dates and times for the meetings posted on the ISP website in an online calendar format. Regional meeting locations should be rotated to encourage better participation.
- Identify what 9-1-1 standards should do at a minimum.
- Have scalable standards based on public perception by region for emergency response service (Standards initiative) to minimize occurrence of wasted funds on technology that is not expected by the public (e.g., if text messaging is the most advanced technology for that area, MMS technology would be unnecessary)
- Is 3-1-1 going to affect/impact 9-1-1 operations? Is it in the plan? Will it be blended into 9-1-1? Does 3-1-1 complement 9-1-1; and, if so, in what way? What is the driving factor

to blend 3-1-1 (economies of scales)? The varying skill sets and mission difference between 9-1-1 and 3-1-1 needs to be emphasized by public safety officials to local administrators and legislators.

- Does there need to be more joint RPAC-I/9-1-1 meetings?
- PSAPs can manage their own profile for survey data, making updates when necessary via a secured online access tool/format.
- Web-based information and resources need to be made available for state and federal 9-1-1 guidelines/standards, code, and pending legislation.
- Web-based statewide job postings with qualifications and salaries accessible via the VITA website
- A training component needs to be added as a strategic initiative to promote the training of 9-1-1 professionals, which would also include identifying available training opportunities (grant program assistance to meet strategic initiative)
- VITA to provide a knowledge center for educational materials and resources for the 9-1-1/public safety communications community
- VITA should partner with 9-1-1/public safety communications profession-specific organizations to identify one or two retention tool as a part of the Recruitment and Retention initiative.
- Collaborative recruitment and retention campaigns such as the Metro 9-1-1 project in FY08 should be encouraged and supported in the Recruitment and Retention initiative.
- The word "Wireless" needs to be taken out of "E-911 Wireless Services Board" in consideration of advancing changes in technologies (requires legislative action)
- Vendors are starting to aggressively push hosted IP services, including hardware and software (CAD). This needs to be addressed in the Plan with regard to reasonable applicability or sustainability to the PSAPs.
- Regional EZNet service opportunities should be identified and address in the Plan (would effectively enable the NG service initiative). Plan should also address assisting PSAPs with the advancement to IP architecture.
- NG 9-1-1 has to be able to be sustained monetarily by all PSAPs before Virginia can realistically be considered NG 9-1-1 capable/ready.
- Plan goals need to be changed to reflect actions or efforts that PSAPs actually have control over (keep it to what can be controlled). Individual or PSAP-driven standards should be recognized or identified in the Plan.

- Goal A should provide a minimal standard level:
 - What is the "standard"?
 - Accreditation SCJS
 - Every PSAP should meet the public's expectation for EMD

- Alabama and Iowa has/have issued a statewide RFP for hosted IP services for NG 9-1-1. In Virginia's review of this effort for applicability to the Commonwealth, it should keep in mind:
 - Total PSAP buy-in, literally and figuratively
 - What role does the state play with NG 9-1-1 based on existing legislative mandate?
 - How Virginia can duplicate the success of a statewide hosted IP services.

- Goal A should be focused on the communications center not the emergency responders (response times). In addition,
 - VITA does not have the authority to enforce the standards because VITA cannot mandate
 - Resources are scattered (among agencies) - would be more beneficial to have them all in one place
 - Wireless implementation - now is the time, with new state administration, to attempt to achieve consideration for agencies to have all 9-1-1 related under one umbrella

- VITA needs to take on the role of leader with NG 9-1-1:
 - Don't become complacent
 - It was emphasized that unless in Code, VITA cannot act officially and assist in obtaining funding with legislation
 - One caveat to consider is that VITA has negative reputation based on the VITA/NG Partnership

- Baseline assessment:
 - Survey data has to be used by VITA if PSAP participation is needed in future survey or data collection
 - The Data Dictionary will serve as a reference to the existing initiative
 - Future surveys should be in a spreadsheet format with continuous rows/columns separated by data set headers versus tabbed by data set
 - Better PSAP education needs to be made about the purpose/intent of the baseline survey or assessment
 - Value of data to be captured needs to be identified and made clear

- Lessons learned to be considered from the wireless Phase 1 and Phase 2 deployments moving forward with NG, specifically from vendor involvement

- PSAPs should get cost recovery not CMRs with MG deployment. This would require legislation that would help Virginia become a champion of the PSAP community (changing the cost recovery model).
 - Advocacy needs to be at the 9-1-1/public safety communications profession-specific organizational level, such as APCO and NENA
- Goal A leaves out 9-1-1 wording:
 - NENA has 911 & non-911 separated
 - Change Goal A text to “911 emergency dispatch service”
- The Recruitment and Retention initiative needs to be updated to include standardized training needed and standardization of the profession.
- The recent “diversion” of the 9-1-1 funds has really hurt the PSAP community. Legislation needs to be put in place to minimize future occurrences; need to get to the point where funding pays for everything such as in Maryland.
- 9-1-1 is evolving from local and state to state and national levels:
 - Future will result in less stand-alone PSAPs
 - Current funding mechanism in Virginia is a hindrance to moving the Commonwealth forward to NG
 - Other states are beginning to issue RFPs and employ NG on a statewide level (e.g., Washington, Iowa, Alabama)
 - 9-1-1 in Virginia is funding a lot of sheriff dispatch centers (pretty much telephone operators taking messages)
 - Minimal requirement for a PSAP should be EMD
 - Review other states to see how Virginia is fairing with its counterparts
- Vision interpretation is different now than when Plan was first implemented:
 - Evolutionary or reactionary efforts?
 - Vision needs more substance
 - Concern expressed that Virginia will not be a leader in NG deployment; some waiting for NG to mature, possibly another 20 years down the road
 - Current governance with individual local controls is hampering progress; other states have more central control
 - Virginia had central control with Phase 1 & 2 implementation
 - Due to the shift of revenue stream from directly to the PSAP to the state with reimbursement from the state, leadership is placed with the state
- PSAP and dispatch needs to be clarified:
 - More coordinated effort from central level

- NG needs to be viewed more than just from IP considerations
- NG is emerging as a another way to collect key data in providing emergency dispatch services resulting in more efficiency
- From the actual PSAP stand point, there is no current training and/or continuing education on exiting technologies; therefore, PSAPs/Virginia is nowhere near ready to begin addressing NG, which is so broad. Plan's current goals are appropriate and pushing NG in its infancy is premature for the Commonwealth. People are the key driving factor and their learning readiness, not the technology, which is impacting realistic 9-1-1 emerging technologies.
- Advocacy initiative is misleading since VITA staff cannot advocate. "Create" is open for interpretation as to "whom".
- Question was raised as to whether the 9-1-1 Board can serve as an "advocate" for the PSAP community, and should they be serving as advisor to legislators on 9-1-1 issues and challenges.
- Public educate needs to be made for efforts under way by PSAPs/VITA to ensure accurate data for them is available when a call to 9-1-1 is placed. Equipment manufactures need to educate their customers/citizens about wireless service capabilities when they purchase equipment or with existing services/equipment.
- Concern that PSAPs now have to purchase equipment/services based on "anticipated" infrastructure needs - can PSAPs really move forward with procurement not really knowing what the future holds?
- "Standard" has to be defined first to determine if goals are applicable. There is concern about the PSAP community that there are problems with how standards are identified and imposed on PSAPs.
- Defining NG 911 as an initiative
- Analysis of the baseline survey results needs to be conducted and made available to the PSAPs.
- An initiative needs to be considered that provides assistance from VITA and the PSAP community in ensuring equipment/services are being offered in consideration of the population being served (sustainability an issue).